

Somewhere Between New York and L.A.

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Somewhere Between New York and L.A.

by [bethfrish](#)

Summary

February 27th, 2005: Home is where the heart is, but where exactly is your heart?

Notes

- The 2005 Academy Awards were on February 27th. Robert Sean Leonard's birthday was on February 28th.
- Ethan Hawke, along with director Richard Linklater and co-star Julie Delpy, was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Before Sunset*.
- *Sideways* is what predictably won the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay.
- At the time, Ethan Hawke was in a production of David Rabe's play, *Hurlyburly*, doing a twelve week run in New York. Robert Sean Leonard was in L.A., filming episodes of *House MD*.

Traveling doesn't bother Ethan the way it does some people. When he was a kid he actually used to hope that his flight would get delayed, because it meant that he could wander around the airport, take a calm stroll around the perimeter as if it were shopping mall. He and his brother had concluded that you could probably live there for a pretty long time—maybe until you got sick of fast food, or until the bookstores ran out of magazines that you hadn't read.

Ethan no longer believes that he could live in an airport the way he did when he was five. For one thing, there's really nowhere to sleep, and he would almost definitely be sick of fast food after about two days. But he still doesn't mind flying, because there's always a reason he's doing it. Something waiting for him when he gets off the plane.

When Rick called him up to tell him about the nomination, Ethan had snorted. It wasn't that he didn't think they deserved it, because they did—he still had smoke coming out of his ears from the Script That Fried His Brain. But films like *Before Sunset* didn't win Academy Awards. Movies with wine metaphors, and Hilary Swank playing tomboys with southern accents, those were the movies that won. So when Rick had called him up he'd snorted and said, "That great. That's awesome. But no fucking way, man."

Ethan looks up at one of the flashing screens that list the departure times. New York, New York to Las Vegas, Nevada. On schedule. That's what happens when you book a flight for five o'clock in the morning. You get stuck in Vegas for half an hour because all the nonstop flights to L.A. left at normal people times.

Ethan walks over to the airport McDonalds, intent on buying a single Fresh Apple Pie, but the guy at the counter cons him into buying another because, hey, for only nineteen cents more, why not get two? He sits down with his two pies and shakes one out of its box. Fake Poptart-like filling oozes out of an opening in the top of the crust. Ethan makes a face and breaks off a corner, trying to get as little ooze as possible.

Digging around in his jacket, he pulls out his cellphone and begins shuffling through his address book, clicking his tongue as it beeps back at him. He wedges the phone in the crook of his neck and waves at two women who are conspicuously pointing at him from another table. Their eyes go wide as a voicemail clicks on at the other end of the line.

"Hey, Bob. Um, yeah, so it's a little before the asscrack of dawn right now. They've got as booked at a hotel so I'm just going to take a cab over there when I get in and try to catch up on my sleep. Don't worry about it. I'll give you a call tomorrow, or I'll see you there or whatever. And, oh man, we've gotta make birthday plans! We'll go to one of those terrible parties and get you stinking drunk, or high, or both, if you're feeling crazy. You don't know how excited I am that I'm here for your birthday. I would have been seriously bummed if, you know...well, anyway, I've got fake pie to eat. It—it looks pretty nasty actually. So I'm gonna go. I'll talk to you later. Bye."

He flips his phone shut and drops it back in his pocket. There's a discarded issue of *Entertainment Weekly* sitting on the table next to his. He grabs it. Oscar picks, 2005. Taking a cautious bite of cheap pastry, he flips to page seventeen. *Sideways*, surefire winner for Best Adapted Screenplay claims *Entertainment Weekly's* crack team of community college journalists.

He shrugs and flips to an article on Hair Dos and Don'ts.

Halfway into the Oscars Ethan starts to get bored.

Not just bored. Really, really bored.

He finds a scrap of paper in his pocket and digs around for a pen. Coming up with nothing, he pokes Julie in the arm.

"What?" she whispers, fixing her focus straight ahead.

"Do you have a pen?"

She shakes her head and puts her finger to her lips.

Ethan rolls his eyes. "Come on. Yes you do. In your purse. Check."

She gives him a look out of the corner of her eye and grudgingly snaps her purse open.

"Don't worry," Ethan whispers to her. "They're not going to aim the camera at us again. We could be having sex here and no one would notice."

Rick leans forward in his seat at the word "sex" and blinks at them questioningly.

"Thanks," Ethan says as Julie hands him a pen. Wedging the cap between his teeth, he starts drawing a series of dashes at the bottom of the paper. He pokes Julie again.

"What?" she hisses, but she's smiling slightly—that annoyed little smile that only Ethan can inspire.

Ethan shifts the paper over so that it's halfway in her lap.

"What's this?" she asks.

"Hangman. Play with me."

Julie rolls her eyes again and pushes his hand off her leg. "Grow up," she tells him.

Ethan draws in the little two-dimensional gallows. "No, come on," he pleads quietly. "One round."

Julie shakes her head.

"Come on. I'll give you the category, okay? Food."

Rick leans over from across Julie's seat. "I'll play."

"No!" she hisses, inconspicuously smacking both of them on the wrists. "You're little boys, both of you." She takes her pen back and quickly stuffs it in her purse.

"The answer was 'turkey sandwich'," Ethan whispers out of the side of his mouth.

Five minutes later he gets up to go to the bathroom, not so much because he actually has to go, but rather because if he doesn't get up and stretch his legs he's going to start kicking the chair of the person in front of him, and he doesn't think the latter option will win him a very positive response from the person sitting there.

Dustin Hoffman is washing his hands in the sink when he walks in. Ethan gives a small nod and mumbles hi, and then feels intensely stupid. But Dustin only smiles crookedly at him, and Ethan decides with some amount of relief that he's probably knocked back four or five drinks already. It makes him feel a little less like a dipshit.

He takes care of business (even though he really doesn't have to) and inspects himself in the mirror. His bowtie keeps going crooked and he has no idea why. It's already been fixed three times, once by him and twice by Julie. And yet, here it is again. Crooked.

He thinks that whoever taught him how to tie a bowtie must have taught him wrong. The one side keeps popping up, and every time he stuffs it back in place it sneaks back out again when he's not looking. Maybe that's why I'm not getting any camera time, he thinks to himself. Don't show Ethan Hawke. His bowtie is a disaster.

He thinks about calling Bob's cellphone, but then decides that any self-respecting actor at the Academy Awards would have his phone turned off. Or at least set to vibrate.

He has no idea where Bob is even sitting. Probably way up in one of the balconies where all you can see are the tops of the presenters' heads, sandwiched in between contest winners and rich California residents who paid thousands of dollars to spend the night with Hollywood's elite. He'd have to apologize later for the crappy seat. (He'd leave out the part where he waited till the last second to put in the extra ticket request.)

When Ethan comes back there's a young man in his place. Seat holder. They run around filling in the chairs of the people who need to use the washroom or go outside to smoke a pack of cigarettes, so that the main floor looks pretty and full for the cameras at all times.

Ethan feels a little awkward, standing behind this guy. He thinks maybe he should let him stay there. He'll just go outside and get a hotdog. But then the guy seems to sense Ethan standing there and pops out of his seat, darting away down the aisle in search of a new home.

Julie and Rick are huddled together over a sheet of paper. They don't even notice when he sits back down.

"What are you doing?" Ethan whispers, resettling for another hour and twenty minutes of magic.

Julie doesn't look up. "Playing hangman. It's fun."

Rick frowns, pointing at the hanging stick figure that's fully drawn save for his left hand.

Julie giggles softly. "Rick kind of sucks."

Ethan shakes his head and pulls out his cellphone. "Want to play hangman?" he types into the text message box. He hits send, hoping that Bob's phone is on vibrate and not off.

Even when the show is over, it's not *really* over. There's dinner and milling and obligatory congratulations. That "we ALL deserved it" false modesty that gets passed around the room, moving from mouth to ear to mouth, that by the time it reaches the last person is nothing more than an empty, withered phrase, all the meaning sucked dry. Well *someone* deserved it more than everyone else, Ethan thinks. Or that was just three hours of their lives they'll never get back.

Then there are the photographers. The endless posing and vamping and looking absolutely *thrilled* to be here. Ethan thinks that he probably just looks tired. And if he does it's only because he is. But Julie is stunning—she always is—so they pull off the pose. He figures more people will probably be looking at her breasts than at his crooked bowtie anyway.

He finally sees Bob for the first time all evening as he's about to sit down to eat. "Ethan!" a loud voice calls from behind him. Ethan turns around and there he is, looking substantially more alert than Ethan feels and with a shorter haircut than when he saw him last, but still the same old Bob.

"Finally!" Ethan exclaims, stepping forward and pulling him into a hug. "Your hair is shorter," he says with some amount of concern, looking him over when they step back.

"TV oncologists don't have long hair, apparently." Bob shrugs.

Ethan smiles, holding his friend at arm length. That familiar pose struck by friends who haven't seen each other in far too long.

"Well, come on. Sit at the loser table with us," Ethan says, guiding his hand around Bob's back. As if on cue, Julie and Rick wave from behind their wine glasses.

"Where were you sitting anyway?" Ethan asks as they sit down. "I didn't even see you."

"Yeah. I don't think I was in the same building as you. Just how long did you wait to put that ticket request in?"

Ethan pretends he's inspecting the ceiling for loose rafters. "Um."

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

The night gets better and better with every progressive round of cocktails. And if not better, at least less excruciating. Ethan, Bob, Rick, and Julie sit around and discuss their current projects; ones they've yet to hear about and ones they've already shared ten times. Around the third drink, Ethan starts to get appropriately touchy-feely given the atmosphere, putting his arm around Julie and rubbing his foot against Bob's leg under the table. Julie giggles and Bob doesn't say anything, because it's the Oscars, and Bob's had three cocktails himself.

They change settings at some point, piling into a limousine with the rest of Hollywood. Ethan's not quite as wasted as he thinks he wants to be, but he's promised himself that that will come with time.

The after parties are where people come to have either drunken, meaningless sex, or to brag to their colleagues, or both. Ethan doesn't particularly care for any of these choices, but he mingles like he's expected to, and any time he feels the boredom starting to set in he just orders another drink.

Bob drifts in and out of his company, doing his best to mingle in his own right. Ethan begins to feel like he's at some really bad high school party, where everyone is either drunk or high or having sex outside by the pool, and the person you really want to go home with keeps disappearing on you. Yes, it's the Oscars and yes, he's had enough alcohol by now to stock an entire frat house, but he can't seem to shake the feeling that he'd rather be somewhere else.

At some point Ethan checks his watch and realizes that it's quarter to one. Something clicks inside his head. Excusing himself from an intensely boring conversation with Antonio Banderas and Melanie Griffith about their lovely and loving children, he weaves through the throngs of alcohol-infused Hollywood until he finds Bob over at the bar.

"Come here," Ethan says in his ear when he drifts up behind him.

Bob spins around. "Oh, hey. Want anything?"

"No." Ethan takes the glass out of his hand and sets it on the counter. "Come here. I want to show you something."

"What? Why?" Bob's cheeks are flushed, and if the thought weren't minimally alarming, Ethan would think that Bob's had more to drink than he has.

Ethan grins sloppily and takes his arm. "Just come here."

They weave back through the crowd, Ethan pushing and pulling and guiding until they're standing in the shadows outside one of the back doors. Ethan lets go of his arm.

"What's going on?" Bob laughs as Ethan backs him up against the wall.

"It's past midnight," Ethan informs him smugly, high on the alcohol and the moonlight and the sheer joy of being alone with his best friend. "Happy birthday," he says, then leans in and presses a kiss against his lips.

"Eth—" Bob tries to get out, but Ethan slips his tongue in his mouth and suddenly Bob has no idea what he was about to say.

Ethan meant for it to be a tiny peck, a little celebratory kiss marking both Bob's birthday and their reunion. But he's having some trouble with the chaste thing, and within ten seconds he's got Bob pressed up against the wall with his knee between his thighs and his arms feeling their way underneath Bob's jacket.

When they break apart they're both flushed and their shoulders are heaving, short, uneven breaths cutting through the muted celebration happening on the other side of the wall.

"We must be really drunk," Bob decides with a laugh.

Ethan frowns. "Uh oh. Did I only dream that we're sleeping together?"

"No," Bob says, pressing their foreheads together. Ethan can feel the heat of his breath against his lips. "I just meant that we must be really drunk to be doing this out here."

"Hmm," Ethan says, pushing his hips forward. Bob breathes in sharply. "You're probably right." He reaches around between them and fingers the buckle on Bob's belt, shiny and smooth, and surprisingly easy to undo with one hand. Bob's eyes widen.

"E—Ethan..."

"Yes?" Ethan looks up at him innocently, smiling as he begins to draw down his zipper.

"Ethan, I don't think—god!"

Ethan slips his hand into Bob's pants and gives a low chuckle.

"Ethan...god...okay, h—hang on..." Bob takes Ethan's wrist and holds it steady. "Not that drunk yet."

Ethan cocks his head. "I don't know. Your dick seems happy enough."

"Well, re—ahh! Ethan, stop it! Regardless, I generally have the final say. Another martini and maybe we'll see."

Ethan smirks and stills his hand. "Hmm. We'll just have to go somewhere else then." He pulls away and takes Bob's arm, not seeming to care that his pants are still undone.

"Ethan!" Bob yells behind him, fumbling with his zipper. "Where are we going?"

"We're leaving," Ethan informs him as they make their way around the building to the swarm of ready-and-waiting limousines.

"But, we didn't say goodbye," Bob puffs, giving up on his belt.

Ethan pulls the door open and crawls inside, taking Bob by the wrist and pulling him in after. "They'll live." Ethan picks up the limo phone and hands it to Bob. "Address."

Bob stares at the phone and then at Ethan, and then at Ethan's fingers brushing against the waistline of his pants. He gives the driver his address, and then falls back against the seat as Ethan goes for his zipper.

Ethan picks up the phone again as he's sliding Bob's pants down on his hips, and instructs the driver to take the longest route possible.

Ethan wakes up the next morning with a dull pain in his left temple

and a vaguely acidic taste in his mouth. He rubs at his eyes and rolls over onto his side. The pillow next to him is beaten out of shape from what he vaguely remembers as two hours of sleep, forty-five minutes of sex, and another three hours of sleep. The bed is depressingly empty until he registers the distant whoosh of a shower running.

Ethan's still lying there when Bob comes out, patting at his hair with a towel.

"I've got to be at the studio by eleven," Bob tells him. "But they probably won't even do my scenes today."

Ethan watches him get dressed. "Meaning what."

"Meaning," Bob says as he buttons his shirt, "you can come if you want. Unless you'd rather sleep some more."

Ethan rolls onto his stomach and rests his head on his arms. "I'll come. How about breakfast?" he asks.

Bob looks at his watch. "No time. But I was thinking we could go out for dinner. Have a little birthday celebration."

"Hmm...celebration," Ethan says, rolling *celebration* around on his tongue so that it sounds dirty. "Sounds good to me." He rolls over again and sits up, scratching his chest absently. "So...no breakfast then? Because I've got to tell you. Whatever the hell I drank last night is having a party in my left temple."

"There's some really bad instant coffee around here somewhere," Bob says, chewing on his lip.

Ethan drags himself out of bed, feet hitting the floor with a cold smack. He blinks away the white behind his eyes as the sudden blood flow does strange and painful things to his head. "It's too early," he grumbles.

"It's almost ten o'clock," Bob says, throwing a small bag of ground coffee at him. "Coffeemaker's over there."

They go to the studio where Bob's show is filmed, and Ethan meets the cast. There's Jesse, Omar, and Jennifer. A bunch of extras who have no lines but are making fifty bucks to walk by in the background carrying clipboards. Upon meeting Hugh, Ethan gets the distinct impression that the man doesn't like him, though he really has no explanation as to why he wouldn't.

Bob ends up being right. They don't do any of his scenes today, and he and Ethan spend the better part of three hours watching other people work. Halfway through the day Bob gets a phone call from his parents, wishing their son a happy birthday.

"Go talk to Hugh," he tells Ethan before slipping outside to take the call.

Ethan is still thoroughly convinced that Hugh doesn't like him, and goes to talk to Jesse instead. Jesse takes him around the set and shows him all the fake medical equipment they use during the show. "We call this 'the pee colored stuff,'" he says, shaking a little vial of suspiciously urine-tinted water.

"What would happen if I drank it?" Ethan asks.

Jesse peers at the vial, thinking. "Probably nothing. But in case something does happen, there's actually nobody here qualified to treat you."

At three o'clock Bob signals to Ethan that they can go, and Ethan is only too happy to oblige. They stop at his hotel to get his stuff. "That way I can just head to the airport straight from your place," Ethan justifies as he checks out. Bob only smirks.

They flip through a local restaurant guide and finally decide on a steakhouse where the entrees don't get lower than \$19.95 and each glass of wine is a steady \$8.50.

"God am I starving," Ethan says as he unfolds the menu.

"Is your headache gone?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. I guess it is." He motions for the wine list. "Must have been the six Tylenol I took this morning."

Bob shakes his head in silent disapproval. "Maybe if you didn't drink the entire bar last night..."

"Hey," Ethan says casually. "That's how it's done at award ceremonies. Particularly the Academy Awards. And particularly when you didn't win anything."

"Ethan, you know—"

Ethan interrupts him, grinning like a kid. "I'm only kidding. I know we

didn't stand a chance. It's an honor just to be nominated," he quotes with an air of superiority.

"That's what all the losers say," Bob mumbles, taking a sip of water.

Ethan glares at him. "What was that? I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you from your seat in the *eighth balcony*." Bob cocks his head at a haha-very-funny angle. "No, really," says Ethan seriously. "It's cool that we didn't win. Whoever won it—"

"*Sideways*."

"Yeah, sure. Whatever. Whoever won it, they deserved it." The waiter comes over and they pause the conversation to order a good eighty dollars worth of food. "My only regret," Ethan says, leaning back in his chair after the waiter leaves, "is that I didn't bring one of those portable DVD players with me. Could have rented a movie."

"You could have rented *Sideways*," Bob offers.

"You're an ass sometimes, you know that?"

Bob smiles, all charm and innocence. Ethan's missed that smile.

"So thanks for getting me the ticket," Bob says, crossing his legs under the table. "Even if my seat was across the state line."

"Believe me, you didn't miss anything."

"No, really though." The waiter comes with their wine. Bob takes a sip. "It was good to see Julie again. And Rick."

"A little reunion," Ethan agrees.

"We should do another movie together. Seriously. What's it been? Three years? Four?"

"Something like that. We should." Ethan swirls his wine around in its glass.

"I love working with Rick. He's such a great guy."

"Yeah. He really is. I don't think there's anyone I'd rather work with."

Bob raises his eyebrows and Ethan cups his chin thoughtfully.

"Yep, there's no one else I'd rather work with. In fact, everyone else

I've ever done a movie with kind of sucks." He flashes a smile of pure Ethan Hawke charm. "Oh, except of course for...Julie."

"I'd throw something at you if we weren't in a nice restaurant."

"You could kick me under the table. No one would notice."

Bob gives him a look. "What, are we twelve now?"

"I wouldn't be above kicking you under the table."

"Well that's because you are twelve, secretly."

Ethan flicks his tongue out of his mouth before taking a long, slow sip of wine.

"So, did you and Julie ever sleep together?"

Ethan blinks. "Funny," he says, setting his glass back on the table. "She asked me the same thing about you."

"To which you replied?"

"What do you think?"

Bob taps his fingers on the tabletop. "I don't know. But if she saw us in the limo last night she wouldn't have had to ask."

Ethan looks confused. "Limo?"

"Seriously though. Did you two ever sleep together?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you're a pretty horny guy."

Ethan pretends to look offended. "And what makes you say that?"

"You blew me in the limo last night," says Bob lightly.

Ethan's eyes widen. "Did I really?"

"Nice to know what I mean to you," Bob says with a small, tragic laugh.

"Well, I mean, usually I wait till we're, you know. Inside or something." The waiter comes around with their food and they sit quietly with suppressed grins, thanking him politely. "No, but

seriously," Ethan continues when they're left alone with their dinner. "I guess it is a good thing Julie didn't see us in the limo."

"Agreed," Bob says.

"We're not," Ethan narrows his eyes and glances off to the left, "going to be on the cover of *Star* or anything, are we? I mean, I didn't, like, take my pants off at the table or anything?"

"No. *I* took your pants off. But you were sitting on my bed, safely indoors and away from the public eye."

Ethan looks at Bob and raises his eyebrows. "God I was drunk. I don't remember that at all. All I remember is waking up at some god-awful hour of the night and realizing that I was in bed with you. And I remember thinking, I have no idea how I got here, but hey, might as well have some sex."

"That's some selective memory you have there. Focuses on what's important."

"Hey, when you wake up in someone's bed, the polite thing to do is first figure out who they are, and then, if it's someone acceptable, initiate some sort of sexual activity."

"The world according to Ethan."

"It should be a book."

"They'd never put me on the cover of *Star*, by the way," Bob assures him.

"They wouldn't put me on the cover either. Just the ex-wife and her latest plaything."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you *were* on the cover. Several times."

Ethan stills his fork. "Don't start."

"Ethan—"

"I'm serious, don't even say anything."

"I wasn't going to."

They eat in silence for a while, silverware clanking over the soft, gentle hum of table conversation. When Ethan's glass gets low the

waiter comes over with the bottle. Ethan accepts, Bob declines.

"Ethan, as if I could say anything," Bob finally says after chewing all the juice out of his forkful of meat.

Ethan tips his head, regarding Bob's earnest look while he swallows. "Yeah, I know," he sighs. "We're both jerks, equally. You deserve to be in the tabloids just as much as the next guy," he adds with a small smile.

Bob flicks him off subtly, since they are in a restaurant after all. "So when's your flight?"

"Ten. But I should probably be at the airport by eight."

Bob wrinkles his forehead. "That soon?"

"Yeah. That's a pretty late flight as it is. I've got the play tomorrow and everything. I'll have to sleep all day. God, this is going fuck with my schedule," Ethan mutters to himself.

"The play. Right. How's that going?"

"Aww, it's great. It really is. I've forgotten how much I love the theater. I mean, film's wonderful, but there's something about being up there on stage. In the moment, you know?" Bob nods. "There's something there that you just don't get when you're in a studio in L.A., behind all those cameras."

"You don't have to convince me," Bob assures him.

"I'm loving it, I really am. I mean, it's tough."

"It's Rabe."

"A lot of Rabe."

"I heard you're changing venues in April. Going for another twelve weeks?"

"We'll see." Ethan smiles grimly. "It's a lot of Rabe," he says again, stabbing at a potato to emphasize his point.

Bob sips his water thoughtfully. "Does it ever get to you? The play itself, I mean?"

"No, not generally. I'm usually having such a great time that the thrill

of being on stage...that's all there is. You know?" Ethan swirls his wine some more, watching the middle fall away as it cyclones in its glass. "But yeah, I mean, sometimes...sometimes it does get to me. I don't know why. It's a mood thing, I guess. Sometimes I'll be going over the script and I just think, man, this is fucking depressing. Nobody should ever go into show business. Ever. Yeah, I'd be lying if I said I didn't love it, but sometimes the thought of going another twelve weeks after this run ends..." Ethan trails off and shakes his head.

"Did you already commit to it?"

"Eh. Kinda sorta. At least six weeks, I think the company said. It's like, I love it, but it makes me depressed at the same time. I feel kind of stuck. Like I can't do anything else because I'm in this show. You know they canceled today's performance on account of me being in L.A.? I actually felt *bad* about it. But it's like, Jesus, I'm so glad I got to fly out here. I needed it, I really did."

Bob nods.

"So how about you?" Ethan asks, slicing up the last of his steak. "How's the show going? How's L.A.?"

"The show's great. L.A. is L.A."

"What does that mean?"

"It means L.A. is L.A."

"Which means you hate it."

Bob laughs. "With a passion. I'm loving the show though. And it's definitely different. I've never had the chance to do anything like this before. And it's really demanding—insanely demanding at times—but I'm usually never in more than a few scenes. Half the time it's what you saw today. Me standing around rehearsing my fourteen lines."

Ethan sticks his lower lip out. "Poor Robert. But really. You like it? The cast is nice?"

"The cast is great," Bob says. "There's no friction at all. Everyone gets along. And Hugh is absolutely hilarious."

Ethan smiles crookedly at a spot on the far wall. "I don't think he liked me."

"What? What are you talking about? Hugh likes everybody. I didn't even see you guys talking."

"That's because he didn't like me."

"You're pulling that out of your ass."

"No," Ethan says firmly. "I got a vibe."

Bob looks at him skeptically. "A vibe."

"Uh huh."

"Right. He's probably offended that you didn't talk to him. Now I'm going to have to make excuses for my rude friend tomorrow."

"Jesse was nice. He showed me the fake pee."

Bob looks confused and mildly disgusted. "What?"

"So how many more episodes do you have left to film? They bought a whole season, right?"

"Just about," Bob says. "Um, let me think. Ten or so? Somewhere around ten."

"So when are you going to come back to New York?" Ethan asks, fiddling with his silverware.

Bob shrugs his shoulders and sighs. "When we're done filming, I suppose. You don't know how much I wish we were filming over there. I mean, the show's *supposed* to be set in Jersey."

"Really?"

"Home sweet home." Bob squints at Ethan over the rim of his glass. "Have you even seen the show?"

"I've seen it!" says Ethan quickly.

"Oh, yeah. I believe you."

"I have," he insists. "I saw the one with the woman. The teacher. Worm in the brain." Ethan frowns. "Something like that."

"At least you saw the pilot," Bob decides, milking the sigh for all it's worth.

Ethan fixes him with a serious look. "Really though, I don't have time to watch TV. And it'd be hard to watch, you know. When you're all the way over here and I'm all the way back there. I wish you'd film in Jersey too." Bob smiles with his mouth but not his eyes, and at that moment Ethan desperately wants to kiss him, but they're in a restaurant and for all he knows the editor of *Star* might be sitting at the table next to theirs.

Bob stares up at the ceiling. "Remember my 25th birthday? We were both in New York then."

Ethan snorts at the memory. "And we invited all our friends over and got high."

"And then when they left we had sex on your couch."

"Those were good times," Ethan says, raising his glass. "A little cramped and I think we wrecked the upholstery, but damn good times. Happy birthday," he says, holding out his glass across the table.

Bob reaches over and clinks his against its side. "We should do another movie together."

"Or a play," Ethan adds.

"We should."

"I have to catch a plane at ten o'clock," Ethan says, frowning. "I really don't want to."

Bob looks thoughtful for a second. "This scenario sounds a little familiar. Like someone wrote a screenplay about it."

Ethan takes a drink and makes a face. "Really? What terrible idea for a screenplay. Nothing like that would ever win an Oscar. You know what would though?"

Bob snorts. "What?"

Ethan takes a long, hard look at his glass. "A screenplay about wine. Now that's Academy Award material."

"If wine isn't Oscar material then I don't know what is. Seriously," Bob says. "Stay a little longer."

Ethan folds his napkin up in his lap, smaller and smaller until it won't fold anymore. When he looks up, Bob is still looking at him. He

exhales through his teeth and gives a lopsided grin.

When the waiter comes around with their bill Ethan swats Bob's hand away from his wallet. "On me. Birthday present. Since I forgot to buy you anything."

"Nothing's changed."

At midnight that night Ethan should be somewhere over the Midwest, flying above rivers and cornfields, and eating from tiny bags of peanuts. But instead he's lying on his back as his best friend thrusts into him, panting and groaning and clawing at the bedsheets until he all but goes blind and collapses. Sated, he gazes up at Bob so that he can watch his face as he comes, holding the shot in his mind—Bob flushed and biting his lip and sighing as he runs his palms down Ethan's chest—because it's beautiful, Academy Award material even, and he doesn't know when he'll get to see it again.

Ethan isn't overly insistent on taking a cab, and lets Bob drive him to the airport at four o'clock in the morning. He loves this time of night, because it's about as calm and as quiet as a city like New York or Los Angeles can possibly get. The people on the street are shrouded in darkness, faces obscured by shadows or bleached out by the bright contrast of the isolated lights on the streets. The paparazzi isn't out and four o'clock in the morning. The studios are locked, the theaters are sleeping. At four am everyone is the same; having affairs in cheap motels, asleep in their beds, shooting up heroin in dark alleyways.

At four o'clock in the morning, Ethan is riding in the car of the man he's been sleeping with on and off for the last decade and a half, flipping through the radio stations because it seems like every one of them is devoted to public access during these dead hours of the night. He sits back as they pull into the airport drop-off area, the Rolling Stones screaming serenely through the speakers. Hearing "You Can't Always Get What You Want" would be way too appropriate; fortunately it's only the catchy but irrelevant "Paint It Black" that serves as Ethan's goodbye song.

Bob gets out of the car and digs Ethan's bag out from the trunk. They'd already said goodbye back in Bob's bedroom, and then said it again—a

little more quickly but with just as much passion—when Bob nudged Ethan awake at 3:15 in the morning.

"I'm going to be so fucked for the show tomorrow," Ethan says with a humorless laugh. "Today rather. What fucking day is it?"

"Tuesday," Bob tells him, dropping his bag on the ground. He holds out his arms. Ethan looks into his eyes, almost black in the dim light of the half-dead airport, but Ethan knows their exact shade of brown.

"I'll see you whenever," Ethan sighs, stepping forward into Bob's arms. He reaches around and runs his fingers over the base of his neck. "I like you hair better long."

"So do I," Bob agrees. "I'll put in a request for you." He thinks for a second. "So you'll stay for Celine but not for me, huh?"

"What? Oh. That was never made clear, you know."

"Oh come on. It's so obvious that he does."

"Well..."

"Maybe if you'd made the ending a little more tragic—"

"Don't even say it."

Bob grins. "I didn't say anything."

"You know, now that I think about it," Ethan says, "*Sideways* had the exact same goddamn ending. What the fuck."

"Wouldn't know," Bob says. "Never saw it."

"You're an ass."

Bob laughs quietly in the darkness before taking Ethan's wrists in his hands. "So. Seeya."

"Yeah. Seeya."

They don't kiss; Ethan only steps back and picks up his bag. "Don't fall asleep on the road. If you died they'd have to cancel your show. And then all those nice people would be out of a job. Hugh would really hate me then, if he knew I'd contributed to your death."

"They'd just replace me," Bob says with a shrug. "You can still do

things like that in the first season."

Ethan smiles and starts walking backwards towards the doors. "Seeya," he says with a small wave, and then turns around and doesn't look back.

There's a layover in Vegas, because that's what happens when you exchange your ticket at the last possible second. Nothing's open except a few sad looking newspaper stands and the airport casino. Only in Vegas, Ethan thinks to himself.

He walks over to the tiny mass of slot machines; there's only one other person there, pulling absently at the lever until she finally collects her change and wanders away. Ethan goes over to her machine and spends the half an hour he has to kill trying his luck.

He actually makes \$345, but when they announce his flight number over the speakers he doesn't bother to collect it, just picks up his bag and gets on the plane that'll take him to where he needs to be.

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